

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

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1. A method for recording network usage, the method comprising the steps of:
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- defining a network data collector including an encapsulator, an aggregator, and a data storage system;
receiving a set of network accounting data via the encapsulator;
converting the network accounting data set to a standard data format;
processing the network accounting data set via the aggregator, including the steps of defining a rule chain and applying the rule chain to the network accounting data set to construct an aggregation tree including creating an aggregated network accounting data set; and
storing the aggregated network accounting data set in the data storage system.
2. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of applying the rule chain to the network accounting data set to construct the aggregation tree includes the step of applying a rule from the rule chain to the network accounting data set to define a group node.
3. The method of claim 2, wherein the rule is a match rule.
4. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of applying the rule chain to the network accounting data set to construct the aggregation tree includes the step of applying a set of match rules to the network accounting data set to define a hierarchy of group nodes within the aggregation tree.
5. The method of claim 4, wherein the step of applying the rule chain to the network accounting data set to construct the aggregation tree includes the step of

applying an aggregation rule to the match group node to create the aggregated network accounting data set.

6. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of applying the rule chain to the network accounting data set to construct the aggregation tree includes the step of applying a data manipulation rule to the network accounting data set.

7. The method of claim 6, further comprising the step of defining the data manipulation rule to be an adornment rule.

8. The method of claim 6, further comprising the step of defining the data manipulation rule to be a filtering rule.

9. The method of claim 1, wherein the network accounting data set is a set of session data.

10. The method of claim 1, wherein the network accounting data set is a set of usage data.

11. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of defining a data flush interval; and wherein the step of storing the aggregated network accounting data set includes the step of transferring the aggregated network accounting data to the data storage system after a period of time associated with the data flush interval.

12. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of defining a rule within the rule chain by a Java object class, and allowing additional rule types to be added to the rule chain corresponding to the Java object class.

13. A method for recording network usage including correlating of network usage information and network session information, the method comprising the steps of:

5 defining a network data correlator collector including an encapsulator, an aggregator, and a data storage system;

receiving a set of network session data via the encapsulator;

processing the network session data set via the aggregator, including the steps of defining a first rule chain and applying the first rule chain to the network session data to construct an aggregation tree;

10 receiving a set of network usage data via the encapsulator;

processing the network usage data set via the aggregator, including the steps of defining a second rule chain and applying the second rule chain to the network usage data and the aggregation tree to construct a correlated aggregation tree;

15 determining a correlated data set from the correlated aggregation tree; and

storing the correlated data set in the data storage system.

14. The method of claim 13, wherein the network session data set is in a standard data format received from a session data collector having an encapsulator, an aggregator and a data storage system.

15. The method of claim 14, wherein the network usage data set is in the standard data format received from a usage data collector having an encapsulator, an aggregator and a data storage system

16. The method of claim 13, further comprising the step of defining the first rule set to be different than the second rule set.

30 17. A method for recording network usage comprising the steps of:

defining a first network data collector including a first encapsulator, a
first aggregator, and a first data storage system;
receiving a first set of network data via the first encapsulator;
processing the first network data set via the first aggregator, including the
5 steps of defining an aggregation rule chain and determining a first
set of aggregated data by applying the aggregation rule chain to
the first set of network data; and
storing the first aggregated network data set in the first data storage
system.

18. The method of claim of claim 17, wherein the step of applying the
aggregation rule chain to the first set of network data further comprises the steps
of:

constructing an aggregation tree, and
15 determining the first aggregated network data set from the aggregation
tree.

19. The method of claim 18, wherein the step of constructing an aggregation
tree further includes the steps of:

20 defining the first network data set to includes a first network data event
and a second network data event;
applying the aggregation rule chain to the first network data event to
construct a hierarchy of group nodes within the aggregation tree;
and
25 applying the aggregation rule chain to the second network data event to
locate similar group nodes according to a predefined set of match
rules, if no matching group nodes exist, extending the hierarchy
of group nodes within the aggregation tree by creating additional
group nodes.

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20. The method of claim 19, wherein the step of applying the aggregation rule chain to the first network data event further includes the steps of:
defining the aggregation rule chain to include a first match rule for
matching source IP address;
5 defining the first network data event to include a first source IP address;
applying the first match rule to the first network data event, including
determining whether the aggregation tree includes a first group
node matching the first source IP address; and if a matching first
group node does not exist, creating the first group node for the
10 first source IP address.

21. The method of claim 20, wherein the step of applying aggregation rule chain to the first network data event further includes the steps of:
defining the aggregation rule chain to include a second match rule for
15 matching destination IP address;
defining the first network data event to include a first destination IP
address;
applying the second match rule to the first network data event, including
determining whether the aggregation tree includes a second group
20 node matching the first destination IP address; and if a matching
second group node does not exist, creating the second group node
for the first destination IP address.

22. The method of claim 21, wherein the step of applying the aggregation
25 rule chain to the first network data event further includes the steps of:
defining the aggregation rule set to include an aggregation rule;
defining the first network data event to include a port number and
volume of information;
applying the aggregation rule to the first network data event, including
30 copying the port number, source IP address, destination IP
address and volume information to the second group node.

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23. The method of claim 17, further comprising the steps of:
defining a second network data collector including a second
encapsulator, a second aggregator, and a second data storage
5 system;
receiving a second set of network data via the second network
encapsulator;
processing the second network data set via the second aggregator,
including the steps of defining a second rule chain and applying
10 the second rule chain to the second set of network data to define a
second set of aggregated network data; and
storing the second aggregated network data set in the second data storage
system.

15 24. A network usage recording system having a network data collector, the
network data collector comprising:
an encapsulator for receiving a set of network accounting data and
converting the network accounting data set to a standard data
format;
20 an aggregator for processing the network accounting data set, the
aggregator including a defined rule chain, wherein the aggregator
applies the rule chain to the network accounting data set to
construct an aggregation tree, and determines a set of aggregated
network accounting data from the aggregation tree; and
25 a data storage system for storing the aggregated network accounting data.

25. The system of claim 24, wherein the process of applying the rule chain to
the network accounting data performs data reduction on the network data.

30 26. A network usage recording system having a network data correlator
collector, the network data correlator collector comprising:

an encapsulator which receives a set of network session data;
an aggregator for processing the network session data set, the aggregator
including a defined first rule chain, wherein the aggregator
applies the first rule chain to the network session data set to
5 construct an aggregation tree;
wherein the encapsulator receives a set of network usage data, and the
aggregator processes the network usage data set, the aggregator
including a defined second rule chain, wherein the aggregator
applies the second rule chain to the network usage data set and
10 the aggregation tree to construct a correlated aggregation tree, and
determines a correlated data set from the correlated aggregation
tree; and
a data storage system for storing the correlated data set.

- 15 27. The system of claim 26, wherein the network session data set is in a
standard data format received from a session data collector having an
encapsulator, an aggregator and a data storage system.
- 20 28. The system of claim 27, wherein the network usage data set is in the
standard data format received from a usage data collector having an
encapsulator, an aggregator and a data storage system.
- 25 29. The system of claim 26, further wherein the first rule set is different than
the second rule set.

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